

corn and the vines in the fields, setting fire to the fruit trees, chopping off the hands and the ears of the poor labourers at their work and killing them in wanton cruelty, flogging women and young girls and violating their honour, seizing young boys and putting them to death, plundering and wounding pilgrims, messengers, and merchants, and cutting crosses on their foreheads, flogging, lacerating, plundering, and making prisoners of priests and monks." Not certainly a promising recruit for the cause of Luther; and yet Luther in the dark Wartburg days, with the sentence of outlawry hanging over him, turned his thoughts to Sickingen as a possible deliverer if it came to the worst. " If," he writes to Spalatin from the Wartburg on 1st June, " they (his enemies) do not alter their course, some one else (pointing apparently to Franz himself) will do it for them, not, like Luther, with letters and words, but with deeds." In his desponding moments he clutches the arm of the strong man on the Ebernburg as well as fixes his faith on God. The military experience and the influence of Sickingen seemed to point him out as the protagonist of the crusade against pope and hierarchy, if no more powerful protector should come forward. Despite his rough deeds, he had made a position for himself second to none among the magnates of the empire, and was high in the favour of Charles V., to whom he had lent money. In this very summer of 1521, Charles, like so many humbler suppliants, turned to Ritter Franz at a pinch, and engaged him to lead his fire-eaters against his enemy, Francis I. Moreover, Franz had a taste for politics, and even for literature and theology as well as for fighting. He was an ardent disciple of the patriot Hutten, and through Hutten he had espoused the cause of Reuchlin against the obscurantists. His castles of Ebernburg and Landstuhl afforded a generous shelter to every fugitive from persecution. It was to the Ebernburg that Hutten himself retired in 1520 when his attack on the Roman tyrant at last exposed him to the pope's hostility, and forced Archbishop Albrecht to take action against the arch rebel. To Ebernburg or to Landstuhl, too, came Bucer, Oecolampadius, and other missionaries of the new gospel or the new culture. Reuchlin and Luther would have been welcome had they cared to accept Ritter Franz's prof-